

Buffalo Bill and the Giant Eyeball

by John Olson

Buffalo Bill rides out onto the prairie. It's a lovely day. The air is a parable of rose. It's early spring. Buds are beginning to burst. Leaves are tremors of green. I'm old, he thinks. I ache. I know more names at the cemetery than I do in town. Getting old is like what? I don't know. Some emotions are too vague to describe with words. You have to use sand, or chiaroscuro.

Words reach out of my mind for paradise. And come back with rocks.

I tell myself: be expansive. Fly this day into prophecy. Persevere.

He is followed by wolves. If he shoots one, the others will get him. He doesn't relish dying like that. But what the hell. Shit happens.

His heart beats faster. His horse snorts, smelling death. The wolves give chase.

He spurs his horse. They take off at a gallop. He turns round and fires a shot. A wolf yelps and hits the ground. The wolves retreat and he continues his ride. He sees a giant balloon overhead painted to look like an eyeball. Surveyors, most likely. He sees the glint of a telescope in what appears to be a basket hanging like a nerve from the eyeball, bloated and unnatural.

The hooves of his horse click like consonants on the stone of a butte. The wings of dragonflies shine in the light, veined and transparent. He squeezes an orange and watches the juice ooze out. A cloud passes overhead. A snake crawls out from a rock. A coyote runs off into the brush. He remembers seeing a skull filled with sand and flecks of gold. And the skull spoke to him and said we must endure the cold. And he could feel the weight of its voice. It felt like a knife blade. Shiny and hard. Like the division between soul and meat.

He ponders the eyeball. The eyeball ponders him. The image defines his day. Until it becomes a speck. And his back aches. And he takes a piss by an elm. And gets back on. And the day becomes less mortal, like blood. The day becomes a wrist of water on an arm of mud.

